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## THE PERCEPTIONAL WORLD OF ALEKSIS RANNIT'S POETRY

ASTA WILLMANN

Hartford Conservatory of Music

Aleksis RANNIT, Estonian poet, essayist, critic, art and literary historian, was born in Kallaste, Estonia, October 14, 1914. He studied art history, Russian literature, philosophy, aesthetics and bibliography at the Universities of Tartu, Kaunas, Vilnius, Freiburg and Columbia. Since the year 1961 he is Research Associate with the status of Pull Professor and Curator of Russian and East European Collections, Yale University. He is presently a Member of Yale University Concilium. Aleksis Rannit has divided his life between art and poetry. He has published numerous essays on Baltic, Nord and East European art and poetry. He is the author of 5 collections of verses in his native Estonian: *Akna Raamistuses* (In the Frame of a Window, 1937), *Kaesurve* (The Shake of the Hand, 1945), *Suletud Avurst* (The Enclosed Distance, 1956), *Kuiv Hiilgus* (The Dry Radiance, 1963), *Men* (The Sea, 1964). Two books of his poems have been translated into Russian, one into German and one into Hungarian, a number of his poems have been rendered into English, French, Spanish, Lithuanian, Finnish, Latvian, Esperanto, and Czech. In 1962 Rannit was elected a Full Member of the International Academy of Arts and Letters, Paris.

### I

Some years ago, as I was having a cup of coffee with Aleksis Rannit\* in the everyday comfort of an American drugstore, he suddenly dropped quite an extraordinary remark right into our otherwise quite ordinary conversation. He said, "I am form-possessed", to which I heard myself respond with equal spontaneity, "I, however, am a fanatic for content". After that our talk rippled along as before, as if nothing unusual had disturbed our most prosaic drugstore chat.

A couple of years passed before something similar happened again. "I have come to understand more and more that form determines substance", Aleksis Rannit asserted in the middle of another rather conventional conversation, to which I promptly retorted with great conviction: "And I, that substance determines form". — That was all. There has been no more discussion about the dynamics of creativity and aesthetics between us, at least nothing expressed with such sharp conviction.

And thus it happens that today I find myself approaching a form-obsessed poetry from a content-dominated point of view. A strange thing indeed and perhaps even a little frightening for both of us; that is, for the poet and for the critic.

Fortunately, however, one of the qualities of any notable creation of art is its idiosyncrasy, its "partiality", or the subjectivity of the creator-artist. For what would an impersonal objective piece of art be, such as, say, a piece of objective painting or music or an objective ode, sonnet or ballad? By this I do not intend to imply that there is no place at all for objectivity as a term in the philosophy of art. As we know, Goethe tried to counterbalance the German "Sturm und Drang" movement by such a factual, objective, and impersonal manner of representation. He wrote: "In Kunst und Wissenschaften, sowie in Tun und Handeln kommt alles darauf an, dass die Objekte rein aufgefasst und ihrer Natur gemäss behandelt werden". What Goethe meant was that the time had arrived for anti-romantic, "objective", classical art. Thus the term "objective value" which is used to characterize classic and neoclassic art became rooted in the analysis of art. Nevertheless, even the most descriptively perfect art can never originate or exist outside the subjective human consciousness of the artist. Equally partial and imbued with subjectivity is the person who perceives a work of art. Hence again — what is an objective evaluation or enjoyment of a work of art? At this point our thoughts perforce turn to the critics of art and literature, to their technical knowledge, which certainly is not to be despised. Even so, I would consider it useful to recall a line from William James' **Psychology**: "... their (the critics') feeling, which is a present sensation, is eclipsed in the glare of knowledge".

Briefly, their judgement may resemble a stock market bulletin of sorts if the resonant perceptual inner world of the art-consumer is to be eliminated. So we may ask whether such an objective application of pure technology is always welcome? Does not a work of art, in the course of time, also enrich its enjoyer, through his creative response that remains undulating around the inner being like the sea around an island? I think so, and thus I am not going to approach the poetry of Aleksis Rannit with the tool-box of a professional literary theorist, but instead with a sieve of my own critical subjectivity whose length of radius shall also be the measure of my objectivity. The larger that sieve, the finer its mesh, ever straining the various visions of life; in short, the more far-embracing and meticulous one's personal awareness of life's phenomena, abstract or concrete, the more substance will remain in the sieve of one's subjectivity, skimmed from the crisscrossing flows from various wells of creativity. Also the more responsive one's mind is to the multifarious interpretations of life, the easier it will be for one to follow the flights of widely different intellects. The Estonian novelist Tammsaare in the preface to one of his novels says: "Men have always been enchanted by logic, that a work of art can be explained and understood when one knows what it is made from and the origin of the material... So strange is man's nature that he is more interested in the Carrara marble or the site of the quarry used for the clay than in the sculptures chiseled out of them". Such a trait is alien to me. And thus all I can offer at the moment is a piece of my own more or less objective subjectivity, as narrow or as wide as it may be, impregnated with the resonant tones of the sound of Aleksis Rannit's poetry. Sound and its resonance — let them be the very key to the following observations.

## II

Once, while holding Rannit's latest collection of poetry, **Kuiv Hiilgus** (Dry Radiance), in my hand, I did something unbelievably superstitious. Spurred by an irresistible desire to know what the superterrestrial powers had to say to me through a terrestrial poet, I opened the book at random — a procedure applied to sacrificial animals in less enlightened times, when their keeling over to the right or to the left after the stab, and the condition of their ripped-up intestines was taken as oracular. My searching eyes suddenly plunged into the depth of the following stanza:

Searching for a subaqueous, inward sky  
amid a liturgical sea,  
the erg of the demiurges  
delved your sadness high up,  
high up into a resounding equation.

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

And then, as so many times before, I found myself caught by these five lines as if in a rocking boat whirling around and around on the dark undercurrents in the heart of **homo sapiens**. I found myself in the cataracts of the two opposing primeval forces simultaneously underlying all human dynamics: in the grip of Eros and Thanatos; Eros far from being a tiny whittled-down shuttle of a feeling between two human beings, but something monolithically basic — the vital instinct, the unselectively all-embracing, all-unifying, all-pervading Life Force itself; and Thanatos being the Death Wish, as fundamental, primeval, and unselective a force as Eros, but nihilistically separating and destructive. It was this antagonism in the human mind, so completely epitomized by Rannit's short-clipped stanza that made me suddenly very much aware of the incomprehensibility of life. I sensed it around me as a shoreless sea over which there hung a cloud of human anguish, the age-old liturgy of man's plight in the universe. And then a recognition struck me suddenly. "There is no other redemption for man but his own clarifying and purifying intellect", I said to myself, "the very power of the demiurges, the formative, molding will, the pulsating erg that ventures to reach after triumphant equations of thought and beauty".

I have come to the conviction that man's liberation from those two antagonistic drives, Eros and Thanatos, is reached through a creatively exploratory approach to life. Although our reason is far too often made to compromise with our subconscious urges, we are, God only knows by what eighth sense, capable of teaching it independence. And only an independent intellect can put the destructive qualities of Thanatos to good use, by turning them into reliable tools for selectivity and evaluation when sorting out and shaping the phenomena of life indiscriminately produced by Eros. Only by the light of independent reason, will an independent mind be able to bring Eros and Thanatos to a clarified balance. It is first of all the artist who more than others feels the need for such a synthesis, closely followed by the art-appreciating consumer.

By using those two contrary forces, Eros and Thanatos, man has, throughout the past millennia, tried to shape the chaos around him, but not to the same extent the chaos within himself. At times he has succeeded in suppressing his inner chaos, but hardly ever in transforming it into a new logic. Of such a feat very few have been capable — extremely few, indeed, even among artist.

Aleksis Rannit is one of those very few artists. It is for this reason that his poems are not hymns to carnal pleasures any more than they are an emaciated monk's liturgy of asceticism. Still less are they mere mood or whim-drenched pictures of his inner world projected on the screen of the tangible external world. The aim of Rannit's poetry is something quite different. It is, first of all, the crystallization of a particular moment of time in the fragment of eternity that separates man's birth from his death. The world teems with dwellers in the jungles of emotion who, faced by raging natural forces, whether

"in their own breasts or on the waves' crest", instantly begin humble genuflections. Aleksis Rannit is not of their kind. Serenely facing the storm he says:

You, broad and soaring  
chaotic storm,  
pour into slimness your strength  
like a tapering tower,

Fall precisely like a message,  
like Memmon's sword.  
Seek words that are wordless —  
words, measure of heart.

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

And then, with the imaginary words of the third-century Greek epigrammatist Dioscorides, he addresses Byron himself in his grave:

Halt for awhile,  
poet of thunder,  
listen to my silence and know:  
dearer than lightning is to me  
the slow flame of syllables.

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

There is power in this striving toward new subtleties, this search for "wordless words", the burning of them in the kiln until they stream slowly in transparent syllables. The process is comparable to the formation of crystals, subject to unalterable rules of growth. In the depth of a hard rock a process takes place, in the womb of a mass of coarse matter something pure and luminous begins to form. In the opaque mass of human flesh and blood a similar miracle takes place. Suddenly a unique and exacting substance comes into being, capable even of refracting and splitting light — the power of thought, the ability to think.

The most precious of crystals, the diamond, the classical **Adamas**, is another symbol of Rannit's art and aspiration, the hieratic flame of his spirit, of which he sings with ardent conviction:

Whatever blaze flowed into your night,  
whatever glare remained in your dawn,—  
you only trust that unique light,  
as cold as lightning, the shadeless light  
that has traversed the diamond.

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

This stanza reminds me of an incident once during a performance of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, when, right in the middle of the so-called "Troll's scene", the light-man, in a sudden fit of confusion, flooded the stage with highpower neutral light, thus reducing the sinister-looking trolls harmless, awkward tramps in burlap rags with smudged faces, jumping around in a ridiculously aimless hopscotch. In a flash the illusion, created by colored lights and a mysterious dimness, was obliterated, and the audience burst into roars of laughter.

Something similar can easily happen to the feelings which influence our steps from morning to midnight, and become our sole masters in the long corridors of our dreams: if only a shaft of impartial light is directed on them, their triviality is exposed, as happened with Ibsen's trolls.

Such bungling of emotionalism Rannit bypasses without devoting a single line to them. Conventionally, however, we are conditioned to think of poetry as a beautiful world of feelings, all explained and ennobled. And thus we approach poetry primarily through our intuitive experience while indulging in an impassioned joy of recognition. If we did this with Rannit's poetry, we should find ourselves in a blind alley, since the way to the core of his art passes straight through the function of the intellect. Unlike emotional experiences, the "pillars of perception" related to the intellect do not have their footing in the world of Eros and Thanatos.

As if striking a final balance with the myopic, emotive indulgence in the pleasures of cells, Aleksis Rannit delineates another kind of knowledge:

The line of waves enraptured me,  
quivering from the wild sun,  
and then — a short stroke  
of the deep black thunder.

Like a powerful fist the storm  
fell on the sea... An instant —  
and the landscape of my happiness  
turned to angry gloom!

All upset was the crisscross line  
between sea and sky,  
and from the boiling metal of waters  
I could have created images.

But the way of my feelings became  
more and more like the way of my thought,  
and the impassive tenderness of the sea,  
the water that gives us light,

that blue of a whetted knife,  
the ultimate color of peace,  
that ultimate blueness of purity  
was what my verse desired.

Goodbye to the storm of my pen  
and the tempest's frenetic blaze.  
I want pain enclosed in rhythm,  
I want fire that has tapered to form.  
*Suletud Avarust*

Riot versus meaning, form versus chaos — these are the opposites from which Rannit chooses. This vital decision is probably best manifested in a short poem about Cezanne:

Great art does not weep or cry  
or cradle generousities —  
it measures the light and shade of truth,  
searching for Doric clarity.  
*Kuiv Hiilgus*

Clarity, however, is brought about by distinguishing, analyzing and defining form. Only in the firm clasp of form does primitive matter take on meaning. The mechanic structure becomes inner form through wrestling with chaos, taming and forging it to a configuration. Form communicates content to us just as the content and purpose of ancient Greek vessels determined their shape: amphora, for wine, oil, or honey; kylix, a drinking chalice; oinochoe, a jug for pouring; the hydria, for carrying water; lecythos, a narrow-necked oil bottle for everyday use; and krather, a large, urn-like vessel for mixing wine and water.

And so no odes of nihilism come from the lips of Rannit. Instead one hears commands very often concentrated into a single brief word: "freeze!" — "Let them freeze into immobility as we do: the flying lakes of clouds, the storm of the Tyrian roses, the evening ashes of the waves".

Before his eyes the Trinacrian night freezes into a rock, the storm becomes static. But this desire for immobility does not suggest lifelessness. It is rather a passion-te aspiration for a supreme moment flooding anarchy with the only light to be trusted, with the "lightning-cold, shadowless light that has traversed the diamond", thus making its true nature apparent. It is also the moment in which the aspiration of the visionary artist and that of the analytical thinker coincide.

Yes, but here on earth, only man is capable of such a feat and only man can freeze violence into a motionless and dynamically serene picture in his mind in order to penetrate it with a shaft of bright spiritual light. Here, I believe, I suddenly find myself at the core of Rannit's obsession with form of which the drawn or engraved line has become the main image. An extending line hardly ever marks vagueness or disorder. It rather suggests a feeling for direction, reveals the existence of some goal and, what is most essential, the line as such is something that restricts and defines. Thus, in the very line, form and content achieve synonymy.

Line, finality, is one of the artist's foremost helpmates, and simultaneously an arbiter in his struggles as well as a critic of his achievements. It is not born in the indiscriminating, "painterly" embrace of Eros, but springs from Thanatos. In the hands of the artist it turns into a chisel or knife with which he cuts off that which is superfluous, giving definite style to what remains. With subtle rigidity Rannit has defined this phenomenon in his poem entitled "Line":

line that ties and limits all,  
precise like the rhyme of death.  
.....

Having broken faith to color,  
to you I give the compaction of my stanzas,  
line conceived by perfection  
is the ascetic square of thought.

*Suletud Avarust*

To shed additional light on the nature of the artist and the man we find a significant poem about the blending of colors, which ends in two sharp, conscious-laden lines:

Blend, blend  
and remember:  
joy is  
color,  
anguish:  
line.

*Suletud Avvrust*

A strangely luminous intellectual perception of joy as of a surface-skimming whiff of colors in the lap of Eros, and of Thanatos as a gust of death and pain stabs one's awareness like an etching needle.

### III

At this point it would be impossible to pass over in silence the meeting of two arts in the persons of Rannit and Estonian engraver Wiiralt. Eduard Wiiralt's theory in art and his inspiration seem to have been forces that brought Aleksis Rannit's somewhat dormant creative under-currents to the surface, giving them a fresh impulse. While writing of Wiiralt, Rannit can hardly be silent about line, thus continuing to observe that peculiar union of motion and matter. In the poem about Wiiralt entitled "He works slowly", Rannit tries to summarize the antithetic qualities in this concept:

Line — cutting blow of a whip, line — most tender caress,  
line — blueness of the sky, — wild hurricane,  
line — fearful outcry, — silence of an industrious monk,  
line — an angel's smile and Satan's gloom.

*Suletud Avarust*

The poet expresses his gratitude to Wiiralt in the poem "So I always see you":

You are silent today. But you have told me much  
about it — that the only thing worthy of the name of Art  
is submission. And strictness of measure.  
And sifting. And definition. And degree.

*Suletud Avarust*

In these lines, it is pleasant to note that Rannit writes in a language in which the antithetic rhyme for "stom" is "form" as in English. It is, however, even more heartening to find in Estonian poetry a eulogy to our great etcher-engraver which we could proudly use for his epitaph:

Carve in the Tree of Cognition  
that fluid song,  
that line  
which allows no deflection,  
and sink emotions,  
the fluttering throng,  
in the silent  
salt of reflection.

(Translated by Ruth Speirs) *Suletud Avarust*

The perception of line carries Aleksis Rannit still farther into the world of intellect, into the background of cognitive methods, right to the point of Cartesian thought, which makes him write about Rene Descartes in the following manner:

In the pure possession of yourself  
reach the Number! Stay!  
And then in the dry light of logic  
melt the ice of passion.

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

Yes, only an intense, will-directed, discovering thought can congeal into ice the passions of man; all the confusion of his emotions must be overcome in order to "reach the Number". Logic strives for dry lucidity, the spiritual key to life which determines the music of reason, in which the agony melts into a new order of sublimity.

We have arrived at the gates of mathematics, at the frontier of that most peculiar continent of thought which is remote from the "pastures" of Eros and Thanatos. Although such an intellectual concept of life has been shaped and crystallized in Rannit's most recent collection of poetry entitled **Dry Radiance**, it had already flashed forth in his second book of verses, **Handclasp** (Kaesurve), published some twenty years ago. Now it has burst into light again through a classical consciousness of art:

False is the thought that numbers are soulless,  
that systems are justly despised.  
No, synthesis tells us to carry on our shoulders  
the laws carved in stone.

Their strictness is not changed by the desire to gad about  
or to simulate fine acrobatics.  
Durer: music of intellect,  
Wiiralt: mathematics of soul.

*Kaesurve*

Thus, long ago, the poet had come to the realization that any creation, far from being an isolated accident, is a convergence of several art disciplines leading toward the same goal, with the emotive and the spiritual, mathematics and music, joining forces.

Of such a relationship Aleksis Rannit speaks in the poem "Paul Cezanne" by making the painter use the following imagery:

He is the crisp blueness of cubes,  
timelessly verdant in time;  
he is a wrinkled tablecloth in which only I can see  
the verdant snow  
of mountain peaks.

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

A wrinkled tablecloth and the snow of mountain peaks — two very different visual experiences between which the imagination creates a particular creative tissue. Such connective tissues linking contrasting images without being subject to any laws of nature are in evidence in Rannit's poetry, in symbols like "the evening ashes of waves", "the icy flame of form", "boil into cold metal", "freezing gold of passion", "the radiance of extinct eyes", "my mouth will never see your shores", "you were born of waves, will become a wave of stone", "the tenderness which is based on concrete". Such antithetic and yet synthetic, unifying tissues, however, can be formed only by avoiding the labyrinths of emotions, and digging a straight main channel, as Aleksis Rannit does in order to catch the core of Georges Braque's art:

Let the luring storm  
strike  
into the mirror of  
primevally-tuned sleep.  
— "I like only  
the rule  
that straightens  
feeling".  
*Kuiv Hiilgus*

The straightening out of emotion, the stretching of what is whirling into direction reveals a classical comprehension of and approach to the creative process.

This brings to mind the ancient Greeks, who became so irritated by the river Maiandres (Meander) in Asia Minor, which wound around itself, that they designated a border ornament consisting solely of right angles and straight lines and called it a "meander" to counterbalance this purposeless whirling of nature.

Although Aleksis Rannit's striving for intense and clearly outlined form is classical, his sensibility is nonetheless almost romantically wide in scope. It could be said that his poetry is a fusion of classicist purity of form, simplicity and clarity on the one hand, and the opulence of content and diversity of elated thoughts on the other. Thus he has attained a pointedly cultivated yet animated and fluent verse structure.

The central image of this resounding fluency in his poetry is water, the streaming form of the hexahedrally static diamond of which he speaks:

Hard and Flowing! — This is the ultimate, supple aspect of beauty:  
to be the beginning of a vault, growing like crystal.  
To be perfected and winged, to be a forged flight  
*Suletud Avarust* (1964 variation)

To be an urge that has form — a discovering drive, pregnant with thought — is the aim of Aleksis Rannit. "Only what is entirely shaped can shape us," says Wiir-alt in a letter to the poet. This truth apparently has established itself as the core of poet's thought. A storm, a churning chaos does not give shape to anything and results in devastation in nature or in the human soul. Such a search for form aspiring to ultimate clarity can hardly find its fulfillment in comparative descriptions or in any biologically attuned calendar of emotions. Therefore, Aleksis Rannit does not write in the same way as Titus Lucretius Carus, for example, did in his time and as many others before and after him have done:

... "before you, goddess, and your coming the winds and clouds  
in the sky flee, for you the cunning earth  
assumes suave flowers, for you the waters of the seas smile"...

Aleksis Rannit, however, writes with a cogitative power that has fought itself free from the biological view of life; therefore, he is able to reach the hidden logicity in other artists. His Signets (Pitserid), dedicated to various creative personalities, may strike us as a navigation chart of the high seas of humanity with profiles of productive or interpretative minds staked out as anchorages on it. At a time when art often is but an outcry in a universal void, Rannit seeks out from all latitudes and strata those artists who have built an equilibrium of tenderness — not on sand but on concrete. Such an effort can hardly avoid classical chastity, as the poet realized long ago, stating plainly:

As calm as that forgotten temple  
in Aigina — so simple should be the verse.  
*Suletud Avarust*

And this is what Rannit's best verse is — as simple as that Doric temple of Aigina — but only so long as we refrain from imbuing it with our own emotional confusion. Yet his poetry strives for something more than repose in classical clarity. He himself is the first to be keenly aware of it. Thus, in one of his poems he confronts the reader (and himself — we may suppose) with the following straightforward question:

— Could Estonian mysticism include  
the embers of the Grecian sacrifice to beauty?  
*Suletud Avarust*

Estonian mysticism stems largely from nature; Estonian lyric poetry is mainly an identification of sentiment with the pantheistic or magic perception of things. To these Rannit has contrived to add the classically dry and airy brilliance of pure mind. This effort rings with lucidity in the seemingly simple poem dedicated to the Estonian poet Hendrik Adamson:

Yes, the Lord has willed it  
that my awe-struck thought  
should shyly warm itself  
in the harsh wisdom of home.

Luminous song  
hovers gently above me —  
radiant tenderness  
of my mother and my birch-tree.

When you come, stroke my earth,  
I have often stroked gravel —  
your anguish will be allayed  
by the earth of my Mulgimaa.\*

*Kuiv Hiilgus*

[\* Mulgimaa — south-central district of Estonia]

Aleksis Rannit is emphatically not an Estonian versifier of demonstrative exuberance, or a Bergsonian bard of animal vitalism, and even less a world-weary interpreter of bitterness and resignation re-evoking the storms of his youth. He is entirely different. He

... is the creator of a new Gothic, — not of style  
but of the spirit, as the ultimate aspiration of mind —  
a surge into the hights, borne by a blast of consciousness.

*Kaesurve*

These words were addressed to Wiiralt but could be applied equally to the poet himself.

#### IV

What, then is that **new Gothic**? Here my mind turns 180°, and I now ask myself what can be the goal of man after he has, supposedly, rid the world of the dangers of war, when his mind is sanitized in schoolrooms, when science protects him from germs as well as from earthquakes, when the proletariat of men has been replaced by a proletariat of machines? In brief, when the materialistic and economic needs of man are overabundantly satisfied, where is he to linger on in the world of emotions? On the battleground of Eros and Thanatos? That would mean stagnation and subsequent degeneration to the primitive cell, a relapse into the chaos of overpowering inanity. It would also mean indulging in the mental darkness of **homo sapiens**, a darkness to which our recorded history bears splendid witness. The escape for **homo sapiens** from such a dismal state will come with new mental perspectives. What might they be? Hardly anyone could give a clear answer to that at the present moment. Retracing, none the less, the stages of man's development in the past, I would ask: could our primitive cell, rolling somewhere in turbid waters, imagine that it would become man and that after a lapse of time a peculiar will-power and zeal called reason would crystallize in this man, making him ask: *W h a t a n d w h y?* So — who can tell what horizons may be discovered by an independent, expanding and continuously growing intellect?

This is what the poems of Rannit made me think of. This is how his diamond — the personally symbolic image of asceticism of form — stimulated my mind. With a new lucidity, I perceived that man's redemption does not come from eternity but from an aesthetic idea of life. I am repeating what I asserted at the beginning: in art there is embedded the emancipation of man, the delivery of the artist as well as of the art-consumer from his own inner and blinding drives, from the fear of dying, that has driven man to wishful thinking and its calamitous consequences.

While contemplating the Cathedral of Chartres, Aleksis Rannit asks:

Where does art begin here, where religion end?  
*Suletud Avarust*

Only man of all creatures feels a compulsion to seek sublimity and only man is able to comprehend perfection once achieved, as also meaning the end of his own journey. Men capable of this task, however, are extremely rare, their concept of life resides in an uncompromising artistic perception of it. The five senses serve them only as springboards to spirituality, as the initial impulse for a surge toward new heights. Aleksis Rannit belongs to this spiritual minority. If his formative notion of life were different, he would hardly write as follows:

It is frightful, that desire for perfection,  
most frightful, however, is the achieved goal.  
You have searched and fought. Now that victory is won  
by which you have lost all.  
*Suletud Avarust*

A goal reached and then the illuminating loss, the new birth through the idea of "radiant ashes" — isn't this the last stage of man's intellectual self-realization, the burning of the diamond into the glow of *via purgativa*? Being satisfied with such a perspective also means that we have fought ourselves free from the merciless gifts of Eros and Thanatos, even more so because we then become their masters. And so, taking one of Rannit's poems for the symbol of this crucial moment of existence, we can proceed with the poet toward his Tro-vian shore, toward the waterline between the oceanic infinity of the universe and our earthly life. Even on such an extraneous shore Aleksis Rannit would be a *rara avis*, a rare bird among the slim-winged gulls of that landscape, as he would also be a very uncommon fish in the sea of infinity.

This reminds me of a little mental incident a few years ago when, while reading Rannit's *Suletud avarust* (Enclosed Distance), I seemed to be on a very peculiar Kon-tiki voyage rolling over nameless seas into the lap of a nameless friendliness. I felt the poet's verses supporting me like gliding balsa-logs, tied together into a firm raft by an intense perception. And I identified myself, as it were, with that sleeping member of the Kon-tiki expedition, an ichthyologist at that, whom his companions once wakened in mid-ocean in order to show him a newly caught fish that had never before been seen or heard of. With a cunning smile, he told them not to try to fool him as he knew well that such a fish did not exist. Then he turned over and went back to sleep — blind act indeed, performed by a sleepy mind, something that I have personally tried to avoid with all my might, knowing that eventually we do have to wake up and accept reality. So I did stay awake and accepted the truth of a singular fish never before seen or heard of, as having suddenly leapt aboard.

Aleksis Rannit is simultaneously the **rara avis** and the **rarus piscis** of Estonian poetry. Content-obsessed as I am, I might finally try to analyze even the outer, quantitative structure of his verse. Or I might perhaps speak of the application of his scanty colors, or the effect of his sea-gray and flame-blue granite. With his reverberant tones in my mind, I might then come to the metallic quality of the music in his verses. I might even take a couple of steps into the inner rhythm of his poetry. However, alas, I must not forget that after all I am dealing with a form-possessed intellect, and that the limit of measure and degree applies also to my mind. A little selfishly I still would ask: is it not true that the purer, clearer and firmer the form, the more balanced and unadulterated the content? Great truths are simple, as also is great art. Otherwise words would remain vague, inarticulate sounds striving for some indefinite or conventional kind of beauty. Such a



superficial tintinnabulation is alien to Rannit's creative intuition. He would rather keep silent than say anything indeterminate. The simplicity he has achieved is by no means the gift of some kind of rare art-minded naivete but the end result of a selective, refining, and purifying creation, a new visionary crystallinity which has overcome surrealist experience.

So here I will finish, as though it were a dim-sighted act to take a step further, and will pass with a deaf ear the wise Stylite of Delos of whom the poet speaks and who also requires us to seek "wordless words".

Aleksi Rannit has found a quantity of unprecedented new wordless words that illuminate our world of intellectual perception. In my address I have been on a similar search but I still do not know if I have succeeded in finding any.

But in any case "the word is the measure of heart".